



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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William B. King, *Chair*, Bruce A. Irving, *Vice Chair*, Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*
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Shary Page Berg, Joseph V. Ferrara, Susannah Barton Tobin, *Alternates*

Date: October 22, 2009

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

From: Charles M. Sullivan, Executive Director

Re: Shell Sign landmark designation report and recommendation

At a public hearing on October 8, 2009, the Cambridge Historical Commission voted to recommend an amended order to the City Council's Ordinance Committee for the proposed landmark designation of the Shell Spectacular Sign at 187 Magazine Street. The amended proposed order is attached.

The City Clerk's office has scheduled a public hearing of the Ordinance Committee for November 18, 2009 at 4:30 P.M. and I request that this amended proposed order be made available to the committee for consideration at that hearing.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

cc: Jim Schiemer
Paul Stanislas
Tibor Hangyal

VIII. Proposed Order - Shell Oil Company "Spectacular" Sign

Order Designating Shell Oil Company "Spectacular" Sign As Historical Landmark

(187 Magazine Street, Cambridge, MA)

ORDERED:

That the Shell Oil Company "Spectacular" Sign ("the Sign") located at 187 Magazine Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on October 8, 2009. The property upon which the sign is situated is Parcel 86 of Assessors' Map 100 (the "Property").

This designation is justified by the important associations of the structure with the broad architectural and social history of the City of Cambridge. Specifically, the Sign is architecturally significant as the only surviving so-called "spectacular" type of neon signs in Cambridge and one of the earliest surviving examples of such a sign in the United States. Constructed ten years after this technology was introduced in America, the Sign represents an early use of neon illumination in combination with the incandescent lighted displays typical of late 19th-century advertising art. In addition, the Sign is historically significant as an artifact reflecting the mixed industrial and commercial development that occurred on Memorial Drive in Cambridgeport from the early 20th century through the 1950s.

The terms and conditions of this designation are as follows:

1. Applicability of Designation. This landmark designation shall apply only to the Sign and all of its structural components. It shall not apply to the remaining Property and any structure thereon, including but not limited to, any gas pumps, filling stations, buildings, and other structures.
2. Alterations/Changes. In accordance with § 2.78.210 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, no alterations, construction, demolition or any other action to the Property that affects the outward appearance of the Sign as visible from a public way shall be taken without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the landmark designation report, section VII, Standards for Design Review, and by the applicable sections of Chapter 2.78, and by the objective that the public view of the Sign from Memorial Drive shall not be significantly diminished.
3. Maintenance.
 - a. The original configuration of neon and incandescent light display, including the existing 14 second display loop, should be reinstated if possible. Alterations that ensure proper weather and water protection of animator box and circuit junctions shall be allowed upon Commission staff review and approval. Existing architectural features such as raceways, lettering, structural system, location and orientation shall be maintained. Bollards or other devices protecting the sign from damage may be installed at the base of the steel structure to protect the framework from vehicular damage.

- b. If after the sign is re-energized the cost for annual maintenance exceeds 150% of the average annual costs over the five years prior to December 31, 2002 as adjusted up or down by changes in the Greater Boston cost of living index subsequent to December 31, 2002, the owner of the Property may petition the Commission to initiate the rescission of this designation and, subject to City Council vote as provided in Chapter 2.78.180 F., this designation shall become null and void and of no further force and effect, other than as provided in paragraph 5, upon the Commission's determination, in the reasonable exercise of its discretion, that such annual maintenance costs are likely to continue to exceed amounts determined pursuant to such formula.
4. Sale of Property/Change Of Use. Upon the Property's conveyance to a third party who is unaffiliated with the Shell Oil Company or if the current use of the Property is legally changed to a use other than a "Shell" fuel service station, the new owner may apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Nonapplicability, as the case may be, to seek the Commission's approval for any change in the sign's appearance or location, which the Commission shall not unreasonably deny in the absence of practical alternatives for the maintenance or operation of the sign or an alternative of the type contemplated in the last sentence of paragraph 5. No such application will be necessary if the sign is to remain unchanged and in place.
5. Preservation of Sign Upon Sale/Change of Use. In the event this designation becomes null and void in accordance with paragraph 3.b or of this designation, or upon the maintenance or operation of the sign no longer being a practical alternative, the owner and the Commission shall use their best efforts to preserve the Sign, including carefully dismantling and storing the sign. The Shell Oil Company and the new owner may determine that ownership of the sign will revert to the company. Donation of the Sign to the American Sign Museum or a similar museum willing to accept the same, relocation of the Sign to another "Shell" service station, or storage of the Sign pending future preservation is preferred.

Cambridge Historical Commission
October 8, 2009